

REMINISCENCES

Alison Arnold Writes...

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Thirty-five years ago today, on Aug. 14, 1945, church bells rang wildly and whistles blew joyfully to announce the official end of World War II. In these days of continuous strife it is difficult to realize how relieved we all are and how hopeful of better things to come. I felt it would be something to describe to my grandchildren some day, and now, in the face of today's uncertainties, I treasure it as a memorable experience.

It seemed like a dream from which we soon must awaken, but the tremendous fact that the war was over dwarfed everything else. For many families there would be happy reunions as sons and husbands came home to carry on normal lives again. For others there was no home-coming and to those went the real meaning of war.

It was of those mothers and wives I was thinking as I drove to Duxbury in the early evening. Boston had been quiet through the long hot afternoon, but there was a feeling of impatience everywhere.

I turned on the radio. A woman reporter was telling of the days she spent with a group of WACs in an apple orchard in Normandy more than a year ago. Then a news broadcast warned listeners to stand by for an important announcement from Washington in just 20 minutes, at 7 o'clock.

While a cool breeze swept over the meadows, bright with goldenrod, and the red August sun sank slowly, the long-awaited news that the Japanese had accepted full and unconditional surrender, came clearly over the air.

There were no cheering crowds, but instantly out of every Cape Cod cottage and shingled saltbox tumbled excited children crying, "The war's over!" Some of them wore pajamas and some waved flags. Others were lined up in pig-tailed platoons beating on tin pans and blowing horns.

Then the church bells in all the tall white spires began to ring out the glad news. Flags were quickly unfurled along the elm-shaded streets. Fire engines shrieked and automobile horns added to the tumult. Radios blared and dogs barked.

Lights burned brightly behind tiny-paned windows as friends joined friends in sharing the joyful tidings. And all through the evening, grateful people knelt with bowed heads in the quiet village churches where their ancestors had sought comfort in other crises in the nation's history.

Finally, the lights blinked out, one by one. The children went reluctantly to bed with memories to thrill their grandchildren in the years to come. The night wind whispered over the fields where crickets chanted rhythmically. Overhead, stars burned brightly in the dark sky. Peace had come once again to a New England town.

Now, 35 years later, many of those children who waved flags so jubilantly on that long ago August evening, have fought in another war far from home. They are hoping their children will know a lasting peace.